United Nations A/C.3/59/SR.12

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
10 December 2004

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 12th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 14 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Abdul Aziz (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Malaysia)
later: Mr. Kuchinsky (Chairman) ..... (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Abdul Aziz (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Malaysia)

Contents

Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (*continued*)*

Agenda item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*)*

* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

04-55279 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Kuchinsky (Ukraine), Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/59/38, Parts I and II, A/59/135, 185 and Corr.1, 281, 313 and 357)

Agenda item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*) (A/59/115, 214 and 281)

1. **Ms. Onyoni-Mogaka** (Kenya) said that her delegation joined the international community in celebrating the award of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize to her compatriot, Professor Maathai, Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. The first African woman thus recognized, she illustrated women's important leadership role and inspired women across the world.

2. In implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the twenty-third special session, her Government had undertaken various measures to ensure the removal of social, cultural and legal obstacles to the promotion and reinforcement of gender equality.

3. In legislative terms, an act of 2003 had removed inconsistencies between penalties for sexual offences against minors and women. The Government had also established family courts to handle issues related to gender discrimination, violence against women and sex offences. Furthermore, all forms of sexual harassment in the public sector had been outlawed. The National Commission on Gender Development had recently been set up as the focal point for gender mainstreaming in all sectors. Police were being trained in gender issues, and new specialized police units consisting mainly of women dealt with child abuse, rape and other violence against women.

4. Her country's efforts to implement the Beijing Platform were beset by major challenges adversely affecting women's livelihoods. Yet women were crucial to the development agenda, being the country's main agricultural producers, and owning almost half of all micro and small enterprises, a situation that was expected to be reinforced with sustained economic growth. But such growth could be achieved only with increased official development assistance, which had declined by more than 40 per cent in the previous decade. Improvement in the pattern of agricultural trade and increased exports would help the advancement of women. Economic empowerment of women would address both gender equality and the issue of poverty-linked violence against them.

5. Not only did the overwhelming majority of people with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries, but sub-Saharan Africa was home to three quarters of all HIV-positive women. Assistance to regions and nations to curb the pandemic must take account of differences in modes of transmission and the burden of disease. Kenya had not been spared. With a 7 per cent HIV-positive adult population, women were often widowed, thus increasing their psychological, financial and physical burden. Recognizing the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS, the President had reinvigorated the anti-AIDS campaign, placing greater emphasis on community-based activities. The countrywide National Women's Programme of Prevention, Advocacy and Support, aimed at mainstreaming gender in the fight against the pandemic, needed to be accompanied by enhanced funding for HIV/AIDS-related activities.

6. Her country would continue to cooperate in the forging of partnerships for the promotion of the rights of women and girls and for their social, political and economic empowerment.

7. **Mr. Osmane** (Algeria) said that the Beijing Conference had been the turning-point in the pursuit of development, peace and equality, crowning, as it had, the long and painful struggle by women the world over for recognition of their rights and status. In a frequently difficult environment, national and international action had been taken to put into practice the commitments undertaken at Beijing and at the twenty-third special session by introducing policies and programmes with a broader gender-specific dimension that would afford women equal opportunities in all areas.

8. The degree of success would be judged at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly in 2005, which would review the outcome of major United Nations conferences and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It would provide the

opportunity to consider new and better approaches to the promotion of women's fundamental rights. No progress was possible in any area without the equal participation of women. In that regard, he paid tribute to the efforts deployed by the United Nations, civil society and feminist organizations.

9. Africa was the region where the status of women was most dire and where they were the first to be affected by the continent's multidimensional problems of chronic underdevelopment and extreme poverty, exacerbated by armed conflict. Their already precarious lives were further undermined by a dearth of basic services, illiteracy and the AIDS pandemic. The lives of millions of women worldwide underscored the need to incorporate into the implementation of the Beijing Platform the outcome of major United Nations conferences on social, economic and financial questions. Attention should also be drawn to the situation of women living under foreign occupation, especially in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

10. Since the Beijing Conference, Algeria had endeavoured to implement the Declaration and Platform by elaborating a wide-ranging national plan and mobilizing considerable resources in some of the most important social areas. Algerian women had already fought courageously beside men in the cause of national liberation and had won national recognition as their full equals, as they had done later in the fight against terrorism, in which they had paid dearly.

11. Algeria had taken steps since its independence to enable women to participate, on an equal footing with men, in the country's political, economic and social life and was now striving to further consolidate and promote women's rights. To that end, a Ministry for the Family and the Status of Women, headed by a woman, had been established in 2002. A bill amending the Family Code would introduce innovations concerning the family unit, gender equality and the protection of women and children.

12. **Ms. Heshiki** (Japan) said that the status of Japanese women and of women around the world had greatly improved since the entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Japan's ratification in 1985 had had its effect on the country's legal framework and had led to many improvements in women's lives.

13. Based on its own post-war experience that peacebuilding and reconstruction could open up opportunities for women and that gender equality could serve to achieve peace and security, Japan had been supporting a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) project in Afghanistan through the Trust Fund for Human Security it had established within the United Nations for the promotion of social reintegration of female refugees and displaced persons. That support included vocational training, seminars and income-generating programmes in order to enable women to assume more active roles in post-conflict Afghanistan.

14. The Government had recently established an inter-agency coordination mechanism as part of Japan's comprehensive effort to combat trafficking in women and girls, and would strengthen its crackdown on all those involved and protect victims through a variety of measures. Convinced that such trafficking could be eradicated only if countries of origin, transit and destination implemented joint measures, Japan was working closely to that end with concerned Governments, international organizations and civil society. It had also participated in the Bali process, which involved regional cooperation to combat trafficking. Accordingly, her delegation welcomed the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, whose work could further enhance bilateral, regional and international cooperation in that field.

15. The situation in which women lived under armed conflict was intolerable and the rate of HIV infection among women and girls, of which gender inequality was one cause, was also of deep concern to her country, while violence against women was both a cause and a consequence of HIV/AIDS, the spread of which also affected human security. Women beaten or dominated by their male partners were more likely to become infected than women with non-violent partners. Education for women about their rights and about the disease was needed in order to break the link between violence and AIDS. In that connection, Japan had assisted a number of projects through the UNIFEM Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women in order to combat the spread of the disease to women in developing countries.

16. Although references to gender perspectives had clearly increased quantitatively within the United Nations system since the Beijing Declaration and

Platform for Action, there was still limited qualitative attention to the issue, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report (A/59/214). It was important that the Committee's discussion on gender issues should not simply pay them lip service but should lead to concrete action and, the implementation of commitments with system-wide coordination. On the eve of the 10-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform, Japan hoped that men and boys would join women and girls in the pursuit of gender equality.

17. **Mr. Bexultan** (Kazakhstan) said his country had resolved to undertake a comprehensive analysis on ways of overcoming gender inequality. Although it had achieved steady economic growth, a country did not grow without the equal participation of women. The National Commission on the Family and Women protected their rights and legal interests and worked with the Government to implement the 2005 Gender Strategy. The Government was working to ensure more active involvement of women in economic life, and Parliament was currently studying an equal-opportunities bill, in whose preparation non-governmental organizations and civil society had played an important role.

18. Kazakhstan's achievements included increased representation of women at decision-making levels; a plan for women's economic development and for better health care and education for women and children; and the strengthening of moral values, including the family and marriage. His delegation was grateful to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other bodies for their help in implementing the decisions of United Nations major conferences and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Family and children were priorities for the authorities, who wished to shield them from need, want or hunger.

19. *Mr. Kuchinsky (Ukraine) took the Chair.*

20. **Ms. Assoumou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the adage "Educate a girl and you educate a nation" underpinned the role of women in both traditional and modern societies. Women, the main agricultural producers in developing countries, were a force for economic and social achievements and biological and social reproduction, and agents of socialization of new generations. And yet, they did not enjoy the same treatment as their male counterparts.

21. Determined to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and ensure their follow-up, her country had ratified regional and international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the relevant International Labour Organization convention. In its efforts to change attitudes, in line with the principles prescribed therein, the Government had prepared the National Action Plan for Women 2003-2007 with the aim of improving the status and living conditions of women by ensuring greater equity between men and women regarding responsibilities and opportunities for economic and social development.

22. The Plan was the basis for key programmes designed to increase women's earnings by 20 per cent by 2007; improve women's health and living conditions and protect them from violence; increase girls' school attendance and improve women's education; and promote the legal status of women, while raising their level of participation in decision-making in senior political and administrative posts. The Plan embodied a forward-looking approach to gender and development, addressing the topical issues of globalization, HIV/AIDS, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and poverty alleviation. The poverty-reduction strategy contained a gender segment that recognized women's key role. Implementation of the Plan would help reduce the male-female divide in which women's representation in public office was abysmally low.

23. Her Government was committed to transforming the country's crisis situation into one of peace, which alone could ensure implementation of policies for the advancement of women.

24. **Ms. Martina** (Ukraine) said that her country saw women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming not only as an important objective, but also as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It reaffirmed its commitment to the Beijing Platform and the outcome of the twenty-third special session, both of which constituted the overarching framework for gender equality. One aspect of the Government's proactive approach in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment had been the establishment of a national plan based on the Beijing Platform.

25. Despite major efforts at all levels, much remained to be done. In that connection, she emphasized the

importance of the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which afforded an ideal opportunity to build on current achievements and generate momentum for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to be held in 2005. Supporting further integration of gender issues into the work of the United Nations, Ukraine welcomed the Economic and Social Council's recent review and appraisal of the implementation of its agreed conclusions 1997/2, but considered that much more was required in terms of monitoring, reporting and accountability on gender mainstreaming. She was convinced that the thirty-first session of the General Assembly of the International Council of Women, which her country would host in 2006, would boost efforts aimed at gender equality.

26. Sexual exploitation and trafficking — the worst forms of violence against women — were on the rise. The multidimensional nature of trafficking in women and girls called for a comprehensive approach encompassing socio-economic, cultural, legal and other factors. In that regard, she welcomed United Nations measures to respond to that challenge and stressed the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which recognized women's vital role and experience in peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. She commended the recent efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to focus on the trafficking problem, as well as the recent appointment by the Commission on Human Rights of a Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which would break new ground.

27. Her Government was implementing a comprehensive anti-trafficking programme, and the new Criminal Code established criminal liability for trafficking in persons. In 2003, as part of its awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, the Government, in cooperation with national and international non-governmental organizations, had held an All-Ukrainian "16 Days without Gender Violence" to attract attention to the issue. Increased attention was also being paid to the problem in connection with the current commemoration of the Year of the Family in Ukraine. The Government looked forward to implementation of the cooperation agreement recently concluded with the International Organization for Migration for the establishment in Ukraine of five rehabilitation centres for victims of trafficking.

28. **Ms. Faye** (Senegal) said that women, the backbone of the family in Africa, were confronted on a daily basis with discrimination, marginalization, lack of access to education, to information and to health care, violation of their rights, and all forms of violence. Senegal had participated in all the major conferences on women's issues, which had enabled Africa and the international community to reaffirm the close link between sustainable development, gender equality and the advancement of women. In 1994, Senegal had also hosted the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women.

29. Based on the priorities identified in Beijing and an in-depth study of the situation of women in Senegalese society, the second National Action Plan aimed to further empower women at all levels and eliminate discrimination against them. The main thrusts of the Plan were women's economic advancement and the fight against poverty; education, women's training and girls' school attendance; women's and girls' health, including reproductive and sexual health and family planning; fundamental and acquired rights of women and girls and access to decision-making; and institutional mechanisms for the advancement and financing of women.

30. Poverty eradication and sustainable development depended largely on the elimination of gender inequalities. For that reason, the Senegalese Government had resolved, with the assistance of all development actors, to banish discrimination and help men and women enjoy equally not only the privilege of contributing to the country's development, but also its economic opportunities. Hence, there were now many Senegalese women in powerful positions, including Parliament and strategic government posts. On the legislative front, a law on female genital mutilation was currently before the National Assembly, and all legislative reforms were accompanied by specific action in favour of women's participation in decision-making and in the formulation of national policies and programmes.

31. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of UNIFEM (A/59/135), whose collaboration with her Government had been instrumental in enabling women suffering from HIV/AIDS to be reintegrated into society. In conclusion, she noted that full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security would go a long way towards the advancement of women.

32. **Mr. Sallam** (Saudi Arabia) said that his Government attached great importance to the role of women in society and was doing its utmost to provide them with the tools they needed to improve their status. Education, the key to the advancement of women, was free for all; currently in Saudi Arabia there were more women enrolled in secondary education than men.

33. Discrimination of any type was against the teachings of Islam, and women enjoyed full civil rights, including the right to buy and sell, conduct business and secure their own housing. Saudi Arabia had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and had participated actively in the Durban Conference on racism. The Constitution contained specific provisions outlawing racist organizations.

34. **Ms. Al-Shamisi** (United Arab Emirates) said that it was a sad reality that women and children were the first to be affected by economic crises and armed conflict, which made them vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. No progress in the advancement of women could be achieved without permanent solutions to poverty, hunger, armed conflict and foreign occupation, which required swift implementation of the resolutions and recommendations of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other international forums on development.

35. The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates provided equality, social justice, security and equal opportunity for all persons. Its national development policy was derived from Islam, and called for a society where the human being was the focus of development and women were considered major partners. To demonstrate its commitment to the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, six national mechanisms for the advancement of women had been established. The United Arab Emirates had also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

36. National legislation — in addition to social traditions derived from Islam, which called for compassion and social solidarity — had created a safe social and family environment that provided women with protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. Women represented more than 50 per cent of students enrolled in higher education. Women worked in all sectors of the economy and occupied 30 per cent of the decision-making positions in the public and private sectors.

37. Her delegation was very concerned about the difficult living conditions of women in Palestine, in particular, and called on the international community to increase its efforts to find permanent and comprehensive solutions that would provide them security and stability to live in dignity and prosperity.

38. **Ms. Mtshali** (South Africa) said that the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had acknowledged that one billion people, the majority of them women in the developing world, still lived in severe poverty. They were citizens of the countries, many in Africa, that might never achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The plight of those women should be considered at the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action to be held in 2005. Furthermore, the members of the international community should use that opportunity to renew their commitments to bring about a better life for women all over the world. She recalled that the Millennium Declaration stressed women's empowerment as an essential component in poverty eradication.

39. Another issue of concern was violence against women and girls, which was closely linked to trafficking in women and girls for sexual and other forms of exploitation. South Africa had put in place a Domestic Violence Act and also a Victim Empowerment Programme, which was an intergovernmental strategy in partnership with non-governmental organizations, for the support, protection and empowerment of victims of crime and violence, with a special focus on women and children. In that context, her delegation particularly welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General on violence against women (A/59/281) and on trafficking in women and girls (A/59/185). South Africa had recently ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and was in the process of developing the relevant legislation.

40. Gender mainstreaming should place gender equality at the centre of analysis, policy decisions, plans and programmes, monitoring, budget and institutional structures. It must also be taken into account within the United Nations system, and her

delegation had full confidence in the Secretary-General's commitment to reaching the goal of gender parity.

41. **Ms. Molaroni** (San Marino) said she was proud to report that San Marino had recently become party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women had long held privileged status in her country, one of the few in Europe which was accustomed to seeing women as head of State. They had not achieved total equality, however, because they did not have the right to transmit their nationality to their children: only fathers who were nationals of San Marino could transmit nationality. In June 2004, 1,703 years after the foundation of the Republic, legislation had finally been passed giving women that right. In addition, a Ministry of Equal Opportunity had been established. She hoped many more countries would work towards full compliance with their international commitments.

42. **Mr. Gansukh** (Mongolia) commended the current commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, which had drawn attention to the fact that, although significant progress had been made, full equality for women both in law and in practice had not yet been achieved. Numerous challenges also remained in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and his delegation supported the recommendations contained in the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/59/214). In the Millennium Development Goals, world leaders had renewed their commitment to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to confront poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development.

43. Women in Mongolia still faced the challenge of interrelated problems: poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, health care and social protection. Despite some progress in implementing the National Programme for the Advancement of Women 1996-2002, unemployment and poverty rates had not decreased significantly, while living standards continued to deteriorate. A new Programme on Gender Equality for the period up to 2015 promoted the family as the basic unit of society and prioritized critical areas of concern with time-bound goals and explicit monitoring and evaluation indicators. Parliament had also adopted new State policies on family development and population development respectively, to promote gender equality in that framework, in addition to a law on domestic violence. Issues related to gender equality and women's participation in consolidating democracy had also been raised at the Fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies, held in Mongolia in 2004.

44. *Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia), Vice-Chairman, resumed the Chair.*

45. **Ms. Seljuki** (Afghanistan) said that, at the national elections of 9 October 2004, more than 10 million people in Afghanistan had turned out to vote; 40 per cent had been women, reflecting the interest of Afghan women in determining the course of affairs in their country. In the past three years, the Government had taken a number of landmark decisions that would benefit Afghan women, including the ratification of the Convention and the drafting of the new Constitution, which guaranteed equal rights for women under the law and their participation in the political life of the country, restoring rights which had been ignored and violated during decades of war and under the rule of the Taliban. The gains made with respect to the advancement of women had taken place through the good will and support of the men of Afghanistan.

46. One of the major casualties of nearly a quarter century of war had been the country's educational system. With weakened infrastructure and disregard for the rule of law, the people of Afghanistan had been subject to patriarchal tribal custom, where women were naturally disadvantaged. The panacea to the country's many social woes was education. During the years of conflict, a high percentage of the female population had had no access to education, either due to lack of schools, barriers of tradition or the erroneous interpretation of religious teachings. Currently, there was an overwhelming yearning for good education, and record numbers of girls and women had enrolled in schools and institutions of higher learning. More than 40 per cent of children enrolled in school were girls. She appealed to the international community to continue and enhance its assistance to Afghanistan, especially to enable it to meet the constitutional guarantee of free education for all its citizens.

47. **Mr. Raju** (India) said that his delegation was pleased to note that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) had undertaken a number of important initiatives as a result of the dynamic efforts by the

newly appointed director to revitalize the institution, but the full success of the process depended on broad political and financial support by Governments.

48. His delegation was concerned that, almost a year after the important initiative adopted by the General Assembly calling for a study in resolution 58/185, on violence against women, the study had not yet begun. National action plans remained important tools for action in that area, and in India, a bill on domestic violence would be reintroduced to Parliament at the current session. In combating trafficking in women and girls — a global phenomenon — institutional arrangements at the bilateral, regional and international levels had become indispensable. India was active in both regional and national efforts to combat that problem.

49. India had gone beyond institutional, legal and educational measures to strengthen the ability of women at the political level by taking affirmative action that reserved one third of seats for women candidates in all local, village and municipal elections. That provision of the Constitution had been a powerful instrument in giving women the opportunity to influence formal structures of economics, political and social decision-making.

50. Despite the many advances of recent decades, the gap between de jure and de facto equality of women remained in much of the world. The challenge was to bridge the gap between promise and performance to ensure genuine gender equality. Gender mainstreaming and a rights-based approach had contributed to the progress made, but gender equality had been least possible where resources were scarce, and the international community must recognize that correlation and act accordingly.

51. **Ms. Bethel** (Bahamas), said that much remained to be done before the targets the international community had set itself in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment could be attained. Those goals were themselves vital steps on the road to social and economic development, peace and security. It was important to ensure that the forthcoming review of the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session would be action-oriented and would feed constructively into the subsequent review of the implementation of the social and economic undertakings made in the Millennium Declaration.

52. Her country had a strong record of political participation by women and of women's access to decision-making: Bahamian women consistently outnumbered men in exercising their right to vote; they also occupied a very significant proportion of elected offices and government posts and the overwhelming majority of the top executive positions in government agencies; many women had risen to the highest levels of the judicial system. Such achievements would not have been possible, however, had the Bahamas not met its international commitments in other areas affecting women's empowerment.

53. She thanked the Division for the Advancement of Women for its initiative in organizing a regional colloquium on the domestic application of international human rights law and a regional training workshop on implementation of, and reporting under, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, both of which had been hosted by the Bahamas earlier in the year.

54. The world's development and prosperity depended on the development and empowerment of fully one half of humanity and she called on all States to reaffirm their commitment to meeting the undertakings they had made at the major conferences relating to the advancement of women.

55. **Ms. Hoch** (Liechtenstein) said her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union at an earlier meeting.

56. Liechtenstein had signed all the international instruments relating to trafficking in women and girls and planned to ratify them once the necessary adjustments had been made to its domestic legislation. Ratification of such instruments, in conjunction with the monitoring of their implementation, formed a basis on which to build an effective strategy against trafficking in human beings. National policy measures and strong and consistently enforced domestic legislation were equally important.

57. Liechtenstein agreed with the view that the international instruments should provide a framework for action to be complemented by regional and subregional instruments, and it was actively involved in negotiations on the proposed convention on action against trafficking in human beings that was currently being drafted in the Council of Europe in order to facilitate international cooperation in providing protection and assistance to victims. Cooperation

between the countries of origin, transit and destination was also essential, and Liechtenstein was working closely with judicial and law-enforcement authorities in neighbouring countries.

58. Prevention was as important as protection and prosecution, however, and in that regard it was necessary to address the root causes of trafficking, such as the feminization of poverty and gender inequalities in the labour market, education and access to certain occupations. A common thread and overriding concern was violence against women.

59. A range of principles, guidelines and recommendations on means of protecting women and girls from trafficking had been put in place by organizations at all levels. Effective implementation of the commitments made in the areas of social development and the advancement and empowerment of women would constitute significant progress in combating the problem.

60. **Ms. Radhi** (Bahrain) said that women played an effective role in every area of life and made an invaluable contribution to decision-making. Arab women in the region as a whole had made considerable progress in the past decade, during which a plethora of bodies had been set up to promote women's rights and the first Arab Summit for Women had been held.

61. In Bahrain, a reform programme had been launched in 1999 to legitimize women's expanding role and eliminate all forms of discrimination against them. Under the Constitution, women enjoyed all civil and political rights and exercised electoral rights as voters and as candidates. The number of women occupying senior posts in government, administration and business had tripled between 1991 and 2001 and women students were in the majority in higher education. There were several women's NGOs, which played an effective role in defending women's rights.

62. At the regional level, the Secretary-General of Bahrain's Supreme Council for Women had been appointed Chair of the legal unit of the Arab Women Organization, which advised Arab States on ways of improving their legislation so as to promote the advancement of women. Bahrain had started to review its own legislation in order to bring it into line with the relevant international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which it was a signatory.

63. The positive changes currently under way at all levels of society would enable women to play a role in building a modern Bahrain.

64. **Ms. Kyung-ah Lee** (Republic of Korea) said the Republic of Korea had made strenuous efforts over the past 10 years to combat violence against women through legislative and institutional measures, and public awareness of the issue had been considerably enhanced. In particular, under new legislation on violence relating to prostitution, women who were trafficked or lured into prostitution through violence, coercion or fraud were considered not criminals but victims and were therefore exempt from prosecution and entitled to protection.

65. Her Government would shortly be organizing a regional meeting of experts, the last in a series of three, that would focus on the protection of victims of international trafficking. There was a disturbing tendency for the victims of trafficking to be treated unfavourably, so it was hoped that the meeting would make a concrete contribution to efforts to protect such women.

66. The Republic of Korea had made great strides in promoting women's participation in decision-making. It had set minimum quotas to ensure greater equality of male and female employment in the civil service and a target of 10 per cent of women in senior government positions by 2006.

67. Lastly, she said the proportion of women members of the National Assembly had risen to 13 per cent at the last elections. While that figure still fell short of the target set under the Millennium Development Goals for women parliamentarians, she believed her Government was on the right track in encouraging women's participation in decision-making.

68. **Ms. Sonaike** (Nigeria) said that under Nigeria's Constitution, all three branches of government were responsible for protecting women against discriminatory practices, policies and legislation. The National Action Committee on Women in Politics was responsible for developing strategies for the mobilization and participation of women in all electoral processes. Existing legislation, including the Penal Code, was being reviewed to ensure it did not place women at a disadvantage or was gender-insensitive. Women were recognized as able partners in development and were at the centre of the National Poverty Eradication Programme.

69. The Government was making determined efforts, through legislative measures, to eradicate violence against girls and trafficking in women. Given that trafficking was a crime that cut across national boundaries, however, international cooperation and an effective international legal framework were essential.

70. Such topics as the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and women's equal participation in conflict-prevention, management and resolution and in peacebuilding were crucial to gender equality and she welcomed their inclusion on the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Notwithstanding the progress made, women were still largely excluded from high-level decision-making in many countries. In addition to implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, traditional cultural attitudes must also be changed, and that could be done only by involving men and boys in promoting equality.

71. Meaningful advancement of women involved recognition of the heavy burden shouldered by women and girls in families affected by AIDS. The international community must step up efforts to curb the pandemic and respond appropriately to the special needs of the women and children it affected.

72. She welcomed the bold initiative to reinvigorate INSTRAW and the efforts being made to improve the status of women in the Secretariat. She urged the Secretary-General to appoint more women to senior positions, in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

73. **Mr. Al-Shary** (Oman) said that comprehensive development of the Sultanate of Oman had begun in 1970 when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said had assumed power. The Government had established 38 women's organizations across the country and had started an information database on the situation of women and their participation in social, political and economic life.

74. A marked improvement in the standard of living and an increase in life expectancy had taken place in Oman as a result of government efforts to improve health services, awareness campaigns, and family planning programmes. There was an almost equal participation of women and men in education. At the primary and secondary levels, 36 per cent of schools were for males and 35 per cent were for females while 29 per cent were mixed schools. In higher education, half of those registered for diplomas and graduate courses were women. In the workforce, women held nearly one third of government positions and about one fifth of jobs in the private sector.

75. Under the law, women were free to own or manage their own businesses and had access to training programmes and loans on easy terms. Omani women occupied such positions as managers, ambassadors, ministers and members of the State Council, the Consultative Council and other bodies.

76. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that the sustained political will of the international community was necessary to ensure implementation of the commitments made to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment were key components of Bangladeshi policy. Until recently, women were a vulnerable group in a traditional society, but a tremendous societal change was under way, which had gone a long way towards outlawing extremist ideology and actions.

77. Bangladesh considered that sustainable development could only take place against the backdrop of democracy, human rights and gender equality. Moreover, economic independence and education were critical to ensure the empowerment of women and it had invested heavily in women's education and economic emancipation. The process of mainstreaming women economically and politically was being fuelled by microcredit and non-formal education initiatives, leading to an increase in women's share of the workforce over the past decade.

78. The Government and the opposition in Parliament had been headed by women for the past 13 years and women held senior political and diplomatic positions. Women were also venturing into non-traditional professions such as the police and the military and had participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

79. Bangladesh was a State party to almost all the major instruments on women's rights. In keeping with the Beijing commitments, stringent legislation had been enacted to protect women and girls from prejudices and all forms of violence and discrimination; however, to be effective, legislation had to be complied with and enforced. Bangladesh had also been closely associated with the adoption of the

landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and, as the largest troop contributor to peacekeeping currently, it had a significant role to play in furthering the goals of that resolution in all post-conflict societies.

80. Violence against women required multidimensional approaches involving the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders. Civil society and the media could also play an important role by raising awareness of the consequences of violence on the well-being of women. It was also necessary to tackle the problem of trafficking in women and girls at all levels, and Bangladesh had played a pioneering role in the adoption of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. The issue of women in conflict situations remained a concern, particularly in areas under foreign occupation, as in the occupied Palestinian territory.

81. **Mr. Ngo Duc Thang** (Viet Nam) said that, following Viet Nam's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, it had established a comprehensive legal framework to promote women's human rights in line with the Convention. The Government had adopted a strategy for the advancement of women up to 2010, whose overall objective was to promote women's physical and spiritual life and to facilitate the realization of their rights in all areas.

82. Women's role and participation in State administration and political leadership had increased significantly, and Viet Nam had one of the highest participation rates of women in Parliament of all the Asian countries. In addition, around half the labour force were women and they were represented in all sectors of the economy. The sexes were also equally represented in primary education.

83. His Government had made great efforts in recent years to eradicate violence against women, including trafficking in women and girls, in part through legislation, but also by ratifying international instruments and concluding regional and bilateral agreements to ensure the prosecution of offenders; it was also taking preventive measures by addressing root causes.

84. Trafficking was a "silent crime", far harder to tackle than drug or arms trafficking or even terrorism. It could not be fought by one country single-handedly but required close regional and international coordination. His Government therefore welcomed all initiatives to strengthen international cooperation in that regard.

85. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2004 and the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2005 provided opportunities to inform the international community about achievements in the protection and promotion of women's rights and to identify the obstacles that must be overcome in order to accomplish the universal application of the principles of the Convention and the Platform for Action.

86. Gender equality was an essential component of sustainable development, but discrimination against women still persisted in many countries and the specific vulnerability of women in the face of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and situations of armed conflict remained to be tackled. Women should therefore play a greater role in political activities in their respective countries, and policies and programmes to end violence against women and girls should be strengthened.

87. Ecuador had made great progress in improving women's rights and instituting policies that benefited women and advanced gender equality. In addition, it had established that all international instruments relating to violence against women and ratified by Ecuador should be operative in the domestic sphere. The office of UNIFEM in Ecuador was doing significant work providing training on the economic and social rights of women. That had led to the establishment of an economic-rights network composed of more than 60 women's organizations which was promoting the incorporation of gender-related issues into government microcredit programmes.

88. Ecuador was firmly convinced of the need to strengthen the role of women in order to achieve the country's social and economic development, and the Government was designing and implementing policies and programmes benefiting women in relation to violence, health, education, work and access to resources.

89. **Ms. Osaki** (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that, as the 10-year review

of the Beijing Platform for Action and the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration approached, UNDP would continue to do everything possible to make its shared vision of gender equality and the empowerment of women a reality. It had consistently supported initiatives relating to women's rights and had helped Governments review and revoke laws that discriminated against women. It was attending the Seventh African Regional Conference on Women, currently being held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in order to participate in the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform and showcase its gender programmes in the region. The conference was seeking to shape a regional consensus on priority gender issues and to chart the way forward. The outcome would provide an important input into the global review in 2005.

90. UNDP had made the deliberate choice not to establish a separate area for gender equality, but to pursue the goal through gender mainstreaming, because the issue was too important to assign it to a separate category, where it risked becoming isolated. However, mainstreaming was not a licence for inaction, but included the responsibility to ensure that gender issues were fully integrated into its activities and policies; support for gender mainstreaming cut across the work of UNDP in all 166 countries where it was present. Despite the many successes, further action was needed to ensure that successful interventions were replicated and expanded. It was encouraging that the preliminary results of the comprehensive gender review of all the national and regional reports on the Millennium Development Goals undertaken by the United Nations Poverty Group indicated a steady improvement in the way gender equality had been addressed across all the goals.

91. UNDP was also working in partnership with other agencies, including UNIFEM, seeking to leverage the latter's expertise and maximize its role as a catalyst of innovative, gender-related programming within the United Nations system.

92. **Ms. Mbikusita-Lewanika** (Commonwealth Secretariat) said that, as a consequence of women's struggle for their rights, the granting of women's human rights had improved in many ways throughout the world. One of the most significant achievements was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979. Throughout the Commonwealth, efforts had been made to ratify, implement and monitor the Convention.

93. The Commonwealth had been working towards the advancement of gender equality, and successive plans of action had brought about a greater awareness of gender issues. As a result of the Commonwealth Secretariat's initiatives, a number of Commonwealth countries had made legislative and procedural provisions to combat gender-based violence, using an integrated approach. At the national level, many Commonwealth countries had succeeded in promoting the human rights of women; some had adopted zero-tolerance policies towards gender-based violence and others had adopted legislation or created special courts to improve the justice system's response to domestic violence. Moreover, the sharing of best practices had helped them make progress in ensuring women's human rights.

94. Despite the achievements, societal structures and prejudices still hindered the full and immediate implementation of women's human rights in the Commonwealth. Hence the need to constantly monitor and address issues related to those rights. Of particular concern was the persistent problem of gender-based violence and the rapid growth in the international trafficking of women and girls.

95. Through its 2005-2015 Plan of Action, the Commonwealth was committed to promoting a rights-based approach to gender equality, by the implementation of national, regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms. Indeed, one of the critical areas on which the Commonwealth focused was gender, human rights and the law. The main areas highlighted were customary and religious laws and practices; the rapid growth of trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, many of whom came from countries experiencing internal conflicts and widespread poverty; the plight of indigenous women, 75 million of whom lived in the Commonwealth; the persistent discrimination and disadvantages faced by women at different stages of their life cycle; and the challenge of HIV/AIDS and its impact on women and girls.

96. Despite the continuing challenges, the Commonwealth was encouraged by what had been achieved to date. The new plan would revitalize initiatives until women's rights were no longer a separate human rights issue, but an automatic component of the rights of all human beings.

97. **Ms. Mapara** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said the Federation was pleased that the topic of violence against women had been given a high priority. Its experience at the national level showed that the issue had yet to be adequately addressed, and it endorsed the Secretary-General's call for strengthened legislation and implementation in his report on violence against women (A/59/281).

98. Several issues needed to be discussed in order to achieve a comprehensive framework to combat violence against women. First, the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic were restricting efforts to assist women in fighting against violence. African Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies had found that, by engaging women as volunteers, they were able not only to empower women but also to make progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Second, today nearly half of all migrants were women, and xenophobia and discrimination were often associated with migration. Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies had focused on the issue and often provided the only support migrant women received. Volunteer programmes needed to be increased and strengthened to provide greater attention to the problem. Women volunteers were best able to provide assistance to society, particularly to other women, and could more easily find support systems.

99. One of the Millennium Development Goals concerned universal primary education, and improved education had to be at the heart of any programme whose goal was to change traditional attitudes and help women empower themselves. The issue of empowering women in situations where they were vulnerable to violence had been a concern of IFRC for many years. Although violence against women in refugee camps was often discussed, violence also affected refugee and internally displaced women who were not in camps. By raising the matter in the General Assembly, IFRC hoped that it would be made a priority by relevant United Nations bodies, in addition to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

100. Gender equality and the empowerment of women corresponded to the IFRC gender policy adopted in 1999, which required each Red Cross/Red Crescent Society and the IFRC Secretariat to formulate measures to ensure that the gender-specific vulnerabilities of women and men were systematically identified and addressed.

101. The IFRC had highlighted violence as a priority in its 2003 pledge on non-discrimination and respect for diversity. The Federation looked forward to cooperating actively with the United Nations system as work to counter violence against women proceeded.

102. Governments should work towards a more proactive programme of engaging with civil society and other national groups on the issue. The answers would not be supplied by legislation alone; there had to be profound changes in community attitudes before women and society would see significant improvements.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.